

Bill 18-22, Noise Control - Leaf Removal - Amendments

Written testimony - Don Peterkofsky, resident in affected area

I'm a resident in one of the areas included in this bill, and I'm also concerned about and advocating for responsible actions towards curbing climate change - as I believe many neighborhood residents are.

Our neighborhood has a very significant usage of gas-powered leaf-blowers as a result of the neighborhood being a large employer of landscaping companies who provide frequent ongoing yard/landscape maintenance services. Many of these companies, as I'm sure we've all seen, often have two or even three workers using gas-powered leaf-blowers simultaneously at one location. The use of this equipment poses both an environmental and quality of life impact to residents - the environmental impact of the high carbon emissions from this equipment, and the quality of life impact by the high levels of noise pollution created by this equipment.

The gas-powered leaf blowers are very noisy, in addition to being highly polluting, and the landscaping companies using these leaf blowers frequently ignore the Montgomery County DEP and Noise Control ordinance that limits noise levels before 9am on weekends, and frequently start working and using these leaf blowers at 7:30am on Saturdays and Sundays. We live in a fairly new construction home with fully-insulated exterior walls and double-paned glass windows, yet are frequently awakened or disturbed by the sound of these leaf blowers - because the frequency and volume of the engines penetrates walls and windows of homes. Use of electric-powered alternatives would dramatically reduce the noise levels that residents are exposed to.

It's been widely known for a number of years that this type of gas-powered leaf-blower is very bad for the environment and specifically for carbon emissions. Many studies have been done and articles written about this; here's one recent excerpt:

https://napavalleyregister.com/lifestyles/the-climate-connection-it-s-time-to-phase-out-gas-powered-leaf-blowers/article_ea84989e-7c1a-55c7-805d-41b35a9f173a.html

Air pollution and greenhouse gases

Two-stroke gas-powered engines generate high levels of pollution and greenhouse gases such as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide and hydrocarbons. An Edmunds report found that a gas-powered leaf blower emitted 23 times more carbon monoxide and 300 times more hydrocarbons than a 2011 Ford Raptor.

CARB reports that operating a commercial leaf blower for one hour emits the same amount of smog-forming pollution as driving a 2016 Toyota Camry approximately 1,100 miles. Leaf blowers and other small gas engines combined now create more ozone pollution than all passenger cars in California.

Other communities in the U.S. have already enacted very concrete changes to stop the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and their associated carbon emissions, like the ban put in place in this California town back in October 2020:

Here in Napa County, Yountville has already passed a gas-powered leaf blower ban, combined with a subsidy program to offset the purchase of new battery or electric-powered leaf blowers and vacuums to help ease the financial burden on local businesses. Battery and electric-powered leaf blowers and vacuums are lighter, less noisy (mid-60 decibels), require less maintenance and do not generate greenhouse gases and smog compounds. New technology makes them just as powerful and similar cost to gas-powered models, with less expense for gas and oil over time.

While this bill specifically addresses the use of gas-powered leaf blowers, there two other similar devices that are also frequently used by landscaping companies and contractors, and that produce the same harmful effects of environmental and noise pollution:

- Gas-powered weed trimmers ("weed-whackers")
- Gas-powered pressure washers

Both of these pieces of equipment use the same problematic two-stroke gas engines, and produce the same concerning levels of carbon emissions and noise, as leaf blowers - and should therefore also be banned in the same way that gas-powered leaf blowers are being handled by this bill. In the same way that effective electric-powered alternatives are available for leaf blowers, they are also available for both weed trimmers and pressure washers.

I fully support the passage of this bill, and further suggest the following amendments:

1. Change the language of the bill from "gas-powered leaf blowers" to "gas-powered leaf blowers, weed trimmers ("weed-whackers"), and pressure washers", and make all three of these pieces of equipment subject to the same ban, phase-out period, and reimbursements.

- OR -

2. Add an amendment to this bill, such that gas-powered leaf blowers are phased out and banned per the language of the bill, and gas-powered weed trimmers and pressure washers are also phased out and banned through a similar schedule and program, with the phase-out period to be staggered by six months - i.e., sale of gas-powered leaf blowers is prohibited 6 months after the law is passed, while sale of gas-powered weed trimmers and pressure washers is prohibited 12 months after the law is passed; use of gas-powered leaf blowers is prohibited 12 months after the law is passed, while use of gas-powered weed trimmers and pressure washers is prohibited 18 months after the law is passed.

Addressing the harmful carbon emissions and noise pollution created by gas-powered leaf blowers, which has a significant negative impact on our climate and environment, is an important and responsible step towards environmental responsibility and stewardship that can be taken by the County. However, leaf-blowers are only one example of a group of very problematic devices used daily in our County, and we should make every effort to provide a complete solution to this problem, in order to make an effective and impactful change. I fully support this bill, and strongly urge the Council to expand the current bill by including one of the two amendments above.

Thank you.